

## Dude, You Have To Stay Still by verokillkaid

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Bisexual Eleven | Jane Hopper, Confessions, Developing Relationship, F/F, Friends to Lovers, Jealous Max Mayfield, Lesbian Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mutual Pining, No Billy/Upside Down Mentioned, One Shot, Past Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Past Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Romantic Fluff

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven | Jane Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Relationships:** Eleven | Jane Hopper/Maxine "Max" Mayfield

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2021-07-01

**Updated:** 2021-07-01

**Packaged:** 2022-03-31 12:47:12

**Rating:** Not Rated

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 2,912

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Max paints El's nails. Max hates nail polish. El somehow convinces Max to let her paint her nails.

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A refashioning of the season 3, episode 4 sleepover scene.

## Dude, You Have To Stay Still

### Author's Note:

I saw this very simple and very vague prompt and couldn't resist.

Additional note: feel free to comment!

*Max's conscience was in overdrive.*

As she laid alone in bed, with El busy in the bathroom, her thoughts took over:

Just the day prior, El broke up with Mike.

*Her Mike.*

They couldn't have been any more intimate if they were *conjoined* at the hip. Gin and tonic. Knife and fork. Needle and thread. *Borderline parasitic*, Max thought. Imagine trying to separate a massive blot of sharpie and your favorite shirt. Impossible, right? Permanent ink embedded into a bundle of poor, innocent cloth.

Well, they were that.

Times a thousand.

An odd metaphor, yeah, but in this particular figure of speech, Mike is the ink and El is the shirt.

Max's shirt.

From the moment El became more than a dematerialized shell of a name that was constantly thrown around, Max was enamored. What she thought she felt for Lucas was *incomparable*. El's entrance was something Max would *never* forget: The door slammed open and revealed a small-ish mass of anger with slicked back hair, smudged eye makeup, and male-oriented clothing; a neat, linear line of blood forming attractively above her upper lip.

I mean, who the hell does that? That's *badass*.

Max could *feel* her brain shut off, leaving her unable to process El's obvious detestation for her.

But that was all in the past.

Including Mike!

...and Lucas.

(And that was exactly why she felt conflicted.)

Instead of feeling immense joy, she should be mourning with El.

(Well, she's not exactly mourning, but she's not too thrilled about it.)

Mike had *the* single biggest impact on her life. He saved her, treated her normally despite everyone's doubts, and showed her she was capable of love. Their relationship was non-replicable, *literally* a once in a lifetime thing, and Max *hated* it. As for Lucas, they broke up at the exact same time, and Max could only think about El. It made her feel sick. Lucas was always good to her, and he deserves someone who is capable of returning his devotion.

*And someone who isn't in love with someone else.*

"What is this?" El asked, appearing out of nowhere.

Max jumped out of her skin. El's soothing voice, full of never-ending curiosity, referred to a decent-sized plastic bin containing various cosmetics that Max has never once used. The collection grew slowly, accumulating over the course of holidays and birthdays, and each new addition ended up in the bin. For some odd reason, Max could never bring herself to throw it away. Different shades of blush, chapsticks, lipsticks, at *least* one of every beauty product imaginable, but the most abundant product was nail polish. Literally, dozens. It was simple and cheap. A unisex accessory with infinite possibilities. Who *didn't* like nail polish?

Max. Max didn't.

A multitude of light pinks and warm, noticeable colors were Susan's choice, all of which Max disfavored, but her mother didn't seem to understand that Max refused to be transformed into the epitome of femininity, no matter how hard she tried. She just didn't care about it. It felt like a masquerade that she didn't want to be a part of. Max was Max. Video-game-loving-skate-enthusiast-tomboyish *Max*. Susan wasn't discouraged, though. Desperation occurred when she was 12; there was an attempt to compromise. Two *cool* colors, a darker pink and a navy blue, were gifted, neither of which she liked, either. So, still, every product stayed neglected and hidden away.

*Please, Max, Susan would say.*

*You're my little girl. My only little girl. Please act like it.*

And she never did.

*Boy, did she get shit for it.*

As El held Max's childhood crisis in her hand, she walked from the bathroom to Max's bed, sitting beside her and setting the bin in-between them.

"That," Max started, pulling herself up and leaning her back against her headboard, "was shoved deep in my cabinet, you snoop."

El chuckled and leaned against the headboard with Max, resting her head on Max's shoulder.

*Oh, God.*

Impulsively, she held her breath and kept herself preoccupied with the hem of the comforter. Quite frankly, it didn't do *jack shit*. She felt faint and mentally cursed when she realized she kinda *had* to breathe, so she did: curt, measured, staccato breaths followed her body unconsciously tensing. El was too busy looking at the colors to notice. Hesitantly, El picked up a small bottle of rose pink nail polish, the cool glass contrasted her warm fingers as she held the foreign object. She narrowed her eyes at it, confusion developing more and more as she glanced up at Max, seeking enlightenment. Max had an idea.

“Do you like that color?” she asked, maintaining her composure. She wasn’t doing it well.

“Yes,” El softly said. She held it up to the soft, yellow light Max’s lamp provided and slowly turned it, watching the glass reflect. “It’s pretty.”

“Here-“ Max grabbed the bottle, her fingertips grazing El’s. An electrical shock made them both jump. “Ow, shit. Sorry,” Max gave a guilty smile and began twisting the cap. El smiled, unfazed, and leaned more into Max. She sighed in content and let her eyes flutter shut. Max froze, wide eyed, and waited until she stopped moving.

“You’re warm. I’m tired,” she said, as if it didn’t matter at all. Max swallowed her panic and lifted the cap, dipping it twice to collect paint.

“Don’t fall asleep on me. Come on, you’ll barely have to move for this,” Max brought her right leg up close to her chest and gently nudged El. “Okay, I take it back, you have to move. Gimme your hand,” she pleasantly demanded, holding hers out. El’s eyes snapped open, silently protesting as she raised an eyebrow, but blindly obeyed. She trusted Max. Max placed El’s hand on her lower thigh, directly above her knee, and drew the brush out. She touched El’s thumb and turned it in a direction she could see. Glossy liquid collected on the bristles, keeping its quality as Max took the first stroke. It was cold, causing El to jerk back. Max wasn’t expecting it. In surprise, her mouth tightened into a small, open circle.

“Dude, you have to stay still,” she laughed, wiping paint off her thigh with her free hand. El lit up at her laugh and humbly smiled, tilting her head down in fake shame.

“Sorry. What are you doing?” she leaned closer and watched Max steadily paint her thumbnail. The color was lighter now than it was in the bottle. “Pretty,” she repeated to herself.

“You know how we’ve been all about helping you find stuff that makes you...you know, feel like you?”

El mindfully nodded without looking up. The bristles slowly

separating and leaving smooth color behind was mesmerizing.

"Lots of people like having their nails painted. Maybe you'll be one of them," she straightforwardly said. Max paused to dip the cap back in the bottle, then continued. "I'm *not* one of them. I'll let you have this shit, if you want it."

This time, El looked up. Her head tilted, allowing her to have a three-quarter face view of Max. She opened her mouth to talk, but her breath hitched. She took a second to observe Max in the soft light. An adoring smile tugged at her lips.

"Why not?" she replied, barely above a whisper. Max was relieved there wasn't any judgement in El's voice.

"Well," she started, stopping to separate El's ring finger from the rest. She had cleared the first three already. "It's complicated."

"I understand complicated."

Both of Max's eyebrows shot up. El did have her beat in that category, by a long shot. Her face narrowed in consideration as she briefly darted her eyes in El's direction.

"Touché," she sighed. "You know how girls typically dictate everything based on what boys would think? I'm not saying all, but... most *want* boys to like them. To consider them. For some reason, they base their worth off of it. So, they spend their time...beautifying. With me so far?"

El nodded.

"Well," Max cautiously continued, applying the final stroke on El's pinky finger. She temporarily twisted the cap and met El's eyes. Nonchalantly, she moved some of her hair in her face to hide the obvious tint in her cheeks. "I *don't* think like that. I don't *want* boys to like me. I sure as hell am *not* smearing this stuff all over me just to please them, either."

El attentively nodded as she listened, her expression unreadable. It made Max nervous.

“Aren’t girls supposed to want boys to like them?”

*Aaaaaaaand, the heartbeat stops.*

Max could feel her blood pump in ears, amplifying her nauseousness. Coming out was on the verge of her tongue. To solve this problem, she bit down on it as she tried to process everything. El’s hand was still on her thigh, unmoved. El was sitting next to her, dangerously close, asking her questions Max shouldn’t have to answer. Pressure developed around her brain and she didn’t realize she was shaking. She didn’t realize she couldn’t take it anymore.

“Max?”

“El, I have to tell you something,” she said, suddenly and deadly serious. It caught El off guard.

“Something bad?” El’s face twisted in fear.

“If you’re an asshole, yes,” she bitterly replied. A trembling sigh escaped her mouth as she sat up, almost forgetting about El’s hand. She picked it up and gestured towards it. “Don’t let it touch anything, it still needs to dry. I’m gonna do your other one.” Max crawled across the bed, settling on El’s side, and sat down directly in front of her. “Can I see your hand?” she asked, nearly inaudible. Pure fear lined Max’s words. El had never witnessed this before. She softened in concern and extended her hand. Max held it and dipped the cap again, then repeated the process.

*Now or never.*

“El, the way you feel about Mike...the way I’m supposed to feel about Lucas...it can’t happen. I’ve tried. *Hard*. But I can’t. I had to break up with him, I...” Max took a deep breath. She couldn’t bring herself to look up. She submerged herself, placing all focus on that hand, making it the most important thing on the planet. If she didn’t, she couldn’t handle saying anything else. “...like girls.”

El somehow softened more. Her eyebrows furrowed in thought before her face very slowly faded into comprehension. With a blank face, and a broken-hearted tone, El muttered words that left Max baffled.

“I thought something *else* was wrong with me.”

Max could feel the tears collect. As they sat silently, she forced her eyes open so she could finish painting the final nail, but she braced herself. She focused on her shaky breathing as she twisted the cap on the bottle. *Jesus*, Max thought. *Way to go. Fucking idiot. You-*

Wait.

*What?*

Max snapped her head up, surprised to see they had similar looks of distress. Her heart sank again. This time, due to the weight of replenished hope.

“What do you mean?” Max nervously asked, chuckling in uncertainty. This felt like a dream.

It was El’s turn for turmoil. She moved her hands to her lap, being careful to keep them undisturbed, and smiled down at them. “I love it,” she softly said. Just like Max, she couldn’t bring herself to look up. Instead, she stared at her rose-colored nails. “This,” she started, fully aware it was enigmatic.

Max plastered a *what-the-hell* look as she sat there, dumbfounded. “Huh?”

“You do *this*. You encourage things. You showed me fun. You make me feel,” she paused, trying to find the correct word, “equal. I *did* love Mike. I *want* boys to like me...so, I’m not like you, but...it stopped at the mall. I felt weird.”

“What stopped?” Max finally began functioning normally again. Feeling brave, she reached out and tilted El’s head up. El froze with a stuck look before continuing. She was getting frustrated. She couldn’t word this like she wanted to, she didn’t know how.

“I don’t know. Mike. *You*, you grabbed my hand. I was still looking around. You took me to that clothes store,” she thoughtfully said.

Max smirked at the memory. “You mean Gap?”



El nodded. "I felt *weird*," she repeated. "Like I felt with Mike. I don't know what it means," she added, finally. To Max, everything was disoriented. Could she actually be hearing this right? Suddenly, her conscious meant nothing. *Go to hell, conscious.*

"Are you saying you like me?"

Unsure of how to act, she shrugged. "I don't know," she answered, so quietly that it was almost unintelligible. "Is that bad?"

*Looks like that bundle of poor, innocent cloth found a solvent.*

"God, dude, you scare the shit out of me," Max admitted, letting out a breath she didn't know she was holding. She tilted her head down, not completely, and shifted her eyes in El's direction.

El closed her eyes slowly, in fear of where this was going. "I do?" She bit her lip, trying to seem unafflicted, and twitched when she felt Max put her hand on top of hers; avoiding her nails, of course.

"Let me explain," Max quickly said.

*Now's not the time to freak out*, she reminded herself as she straightened up. Never once did she think she, *Max Mayfield*, would be sitting on her own bed, holding El's hand, and explaining how she felt.

"I've never been a team player," she started, firmly. "To have friends, you kinda have to be one. So, I ended up having one friend. Only one. For years. Then I moved here, and boom, I had three. Just like that," El looked up. Her fear was quickly subsiding. A story in the middle of this was the last thing she expected. Max met her eyes and continued. "Not including you or Mike because both of you hated me," she clarified, briskly. "Anyway, my point is, my only friend for essentially my entire life was a guy. Girls are supposed to fall for their guy best friend, that's just life logic, but I never did. So, as... kinda...sad as it sounds, I figured I just couldn't feel like that. I didn't think about it. With girls, either, I just...shoved it out of my brain. Then it got deeper with Lucas and he was so *good* and *kind* and I thought that if there's *anyone* I would fall for, it would be him. So, I tried. It just...didn't feel real. The only thing that felt real was how I

feel about you.” El nodded and loosened Max’s grip, turned her own hand around, and sympathetically squeezed. They both smiled at the same time. Max shook off her flush and cleared her throat. “Uh, I’m not done. S-so, you could imagine my surprise when you burst through the cabin like a badass and suddenly I just...felt. All at once. Just...only towards you. No matter what I did. So, yes, you terrify me,” she simply said. No one else knew about this. It felt *amazing* to confess. El’s response was a fairly loud gasp.

“That long?” was all she could get out. El felt dumb for never noticing.

Max shyly nodded. “Yeah. So, to answer your question, it’s the opposite of a bad thing. I have liked you for *forever*, El, so if you’re not sure, I-“

An unassertive, yet determined kiss cut Max off. Max tensed in surprise before it instantly vanished as she leaned into it. El reached up and cradled Max’s cheek, warmth washing over Max’s entire body starting from the source of touch onward. Somehow, she felt numb *and* every emotion in existence. Soft lips, with a hint of mint, made everything fade away. Max didn’t even notice when El pulled away.

*Holy. Shit.*

El had a deep, unmistakable blush that deepened when she realized Max was frozen. She giggled and waved a hand in front of her face. “Max?”

Max shook her head and looked at her, a transfixed gaze remaining in her eyes. “Yeah, yeah, uh, hi...hi...wow...shit,” she stammered, unable to manage. She was just as red as El, ridiculously red, matching the ridiculous grin she had. Their smiles paired as El reached for her hand again.

“I’m sure,” she confidently said. Unintentionally, she glanced down at their joined hands and saw Max’s bare nails.

She had an idea.

“Can I paint your nails?” she randomly inquired.

Max sobered up at that and narrowed her eyes suspiciously. In amazement, she scoffed. "After that, we're just moving on?"

El gently smiled and excitedly nodded. "I want to match with you. Please?" Her eagerness and innocence was so genuine, Max *actually* considered it. Her suspicious glare softened into a conflicted one and she sighed.

"I don't know...you know how I feel about this stuff..." Max warningly said.

"Yes," El nodded. "You said you don't want to please *boys*. I'm not a boy." Her smile turned into a self-satisfied one when she could literally see Max break.

"*Fine*," Max dramatically declared, sighing in defeat. El squeezed her hand tightly as she got lost in her enthusiasm. Max bit the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. No way in *hell* she'd give her the satisfaction. "You're lucky I like you."

"Yes," El began, suddenly serious, reaching into Max's lap and grabbing the nail polish. She untwisted the cap and glanced at Max, an adoring look taking over.

"I am."